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ABSTRACT

This report states there are at least 12 seedbeds of civic virtue considered to be the foundational sources of competence, character, and citizenship. The report also claims that the decline of these qualities is cause for weakening morality and the endangerment of continuing self-governance; and as the social morality deteriorates, life becomes harsher and less civil for everyone, and social problems multiply. The report states the primary challenge for the United States is the moral renewal of the democracy through three proposed goals: (1) to increase the likelihood that more children will grow up with their two married parents; (2) to adopt a new "civil society model" for evaluating public policies and solving social problems; and (3) to revitalize a shared civic story informed by moral truth. A strategy for renewal is given that outlines 41 recommendations to the family, community, religious institutions, voluntary civic organizations, the arts and art institutions, local government, primary and secondary education, higher education, business, labor, and economic institutions, and media institutions. A shared civic faith, a common civic purpose, and a public moral philosophy also are recommended. (LB)

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A Report to the Nation from the Council on Civil Society

A Call to Civil Society

Why Democracy Needs Moral Truths

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On the cover: The Voyage of Life: Youth, *by Thomas Cole, 1842. Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund. © 1998 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.*

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A Call to Civil Society
Why Democracy Needs Moral Truths

Why We Come Together

We come together as citizens of diverse beliefs and differing political affiliations to issue an appeal for the renewal of the American experiment in self-governance.

We come together as Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, agreeing to put aside partisan political disputes in order to rediscover our primary institutions and shared civic story. We come together as people of various ethical and faith traditions, agreeing to set aside theological differences in order to rediscover the public moral philosophy that makes our democracy possible.

What is the state of our union? Certainly there is much good news. America is the longest-lasting constitutional republic in history. Across the planet, opponents of freedom are on the defensive, as the American idea increasingly becomes the world's idea. Today the United States is not only the world's outstanding superpower, but more importantly, the world's great exemplar of democratic civil society.

But let us be honest. In what direction are we tending? In our present condition, are we likely to remain the best hope for a world in which so many human beings still endure neglect and injustice? Are we likely to sustain our commitment to freedom and justice for all, so that those in our midst who are suffering might yet be lifted up by our democratic faith and practice?

No. Notwithstanding the achievements of which we are properly proud, our democracy is growing weaker because we are using up, but not replenishing, the civic and moral resources that make our democracy possible. This is why we come together. This is why we issue this call. ■

The Public Verdict

What is our most important challenge at the end of this century? Is it governmental? Many people believe so. Indeed, at various points in this century, our society has turned to government to remedy social problems and achieve great tasks. Government, many of us have believed, must be a front line of defense against social distress, a guarantor of personal security, perhaps even our basic force for ethical decency and concern. Only government, in this view, is powerful enough to guide the market forces that generate benefits for many, but not for all.

Is our core challenge economic? Many people believe so. Wanting to reap the rewards of self-discipline and hard work, our society in this century has consistently relied upon economic growth as a primary means of spreading prosperity and underwriting equality of opportunity. Moreover, economic freedom can help to secure political freedom, since only in a dynamic market economy are economic relationships independent enough to limit the centralizing, power-assuming tendencies of government.

These issues are important. But the core challenge facing our nation today is not primarily governmental or economic. Neither government action on its own, nor economic growth on its own, nor the two in tandem, can cure what most ails us.

To understand the nature of our challenge, we begin by listening respectfully to public opinion. According to leading analysts, the citizens of our nation have reached two conclusions about our current direction. First, we suffer from growing inequality. And second, we suffer from moral depletion.

As we become an increasingly fragmented and polarized society, too many of our fellow citizens are being left behind, not participating in the benefits of economic growth and free society. And as our social morality deteriorates, life becomes harsher and less civil for everyone, social problems multiply, and we lose the confidence that we as Americans are united by shared values. These two closely related conditions endanger the very possibility of continuing self-governance.[1]

Our fellow citizens are especially alarmed and overwhelmingly agreed about the problem of moral decline. Consider a few recent measurements. The analyst (and member of this council) Daniel Yankelovich reports in 1996 that "public distress about the state of our social morality has reached nearly universal proportions: 87 percent of the public fear that something is fundamentally wrong with America's moral condition, up from 76 percent a year ago. In general, a widespread feeling of moral decline has sharply expanded within the public over the last two years, regardless of gender, age, race or geographical area."[2]

According to a Gallup poll, 78 percent of the public rates "the state of moral values in this country" as either very weak or somewhat weak. About 76 percent believe that moral values have deteriorated in the past 25 years.[3] An analysis of current adult attitudes toward teenagers similarly concludes that the public's core concern "is not youngsters' health prob-

lems, safety, or poverty rates. Rather, Americans are deeply troubled by the character and values exhibited by young people today."[4]

When citizens worry about "moral decline," what do they mean? Do they want, as we so often hear, to "roll back the clock"? Return to the 1950s? Reverse the gains made by women and minorities?

No. Racism and sexism remain serious problems in our society. Yet with each passing year, Americans express growing intolerance for segregation, bigotry, prejudice against minorities, or restricting opportunities for women in public life. Despite widespread concern about our moral condition, there is little desire to "go back" to some earlier era.

Let us listen to what people actually say. First, the public understands weakening morality as behavior that threatens family cohesiveness. Teen-age pregnancy, unwed childbearing, extramarital affairs, easy sex as a normal part of life — majorities of Americans view each of these trends as evidence of deteriorating social morality.[5] When a polling firm recently asked Americans to identify the part of our society where "an effort to do better" would "make the biggest difference," the most frequently chosen answer (27 percent) was "strengthening the family."[6]

Second, the public understands weakening morality as behavior that is increasingly uncivil — that is, behavior that reflects a rejection of legitimate authority and a lack of respect for others. Neighbors not being neighborly. Children disrespecting adults. Declining loyalty between employers and employees. The absence of common courtesy, such as indifference from retail clerks, or being treated like a number by impersonal bureaucracies. Drivers who menace and gesture at other drivers. In general, people who tend to push others aside, looking out only for themselves. Nearly 90 percent of the public believes that this type of incivility is a serious national problem. About 80 percent believe that the problem has gotten worse in the past ten years.[7]

Finally the public understands moral decline as the spread of behavior that violates the norm of personal responsibility. Public examples abound. A pro baseball player spits on an umpire and nothing much happens. A pop star announces that she wants a baby but not a husband. An adroit political consultant turns a personal scandal into a lucrative book deal.

Do these high visibility cases signal a deeper trend? Yes. According to a Chilton Research Services poll, 67 percent of the public believe that "the U.S. is in a long-term moral decline." By a margin of 59 percent to 27 percent, Americans believe that "lack of morality" is a greater problem in the United States than "lack of economic opportunity."[8]

Here, then, is the public's basic judgement of our current predicament: growing inequality, surrounded and partly driven by moral meltdown. Declining morality is reflected primarily in the steady spread of behavior that weakens family life, promotes disrespect for authority and for others, and insults the practice of personal responsibility.

The social manifestations of this crisis are everywhere around us. Let us summarize its basic dimensions:

- declining child and adolescent well being;
- continuing disintegration of marriage and the family;
- unacceptably high (though now declining) levels of violence and disorder;
- deteriorating educational systems;
- an unraveling of many aspects of civic engagement and voluntary association;
- a growing sense that we are not responsible for or accountable to one another;
- a growing sense that relations between races, economic classes, and generations are not guided by attempts at shared understanding;
- an increasing coarseness and harshness in popular culture, politics, and public discourse;
- a spreading abdication of adult responsibility and an increasing acceptance of the adult as a perpetual adolescent;
- an increased tolerance for self-centered and selfish behavior in all spheres of life;
- a growing belief that success should be measured by how much money we have and how much we can buy;
- a dramatic undermining of the distinction between right and wrong; and
- the loss of confidence in the possibility of public moral truth.

The Civil Society Proposition

As awareness of this crisis spreads across the political spectrum, a new term has emerged in our public debate: civil society. Fairly suddenly, the prosaic world of civic participation, family dinners, PTA meetings and youth soccer has acquired a profound public significance. Despite a partisan and often rancorous political climate, Democrats and Republicans alike now extol the concept of civil society. Indeed, civil society is increasingly touted as a newfound wonder drug for curing any number of problems, from fragmenting families to the decline of voter participation. Yet at present, the term is a bit like a Rorschach test: it can mean whatever anyone wants it to mean.

To us, civil society refers specifically to relationships and institutions that are neither created nor controlled by the state. The essential social task of civil society — families, neighborhood life, and the web of religious, economic, educational, and civic associations — is to foster competence and character in individuals, build social trust, and help children become good people and good citizens.

Ultimately, civil society is a sphere of our communal life in which we answer together the most important questions: what is our purpose, what is the right way to act, and what is the common good. In short, it is the sphere of society that is concerned with moral formation and with ends, not simply administration or the maximizing of means.

We call ourselves a Council on Civil Society because we hope to contribute to the debate in the United States about the meaning and potential of civil society. We view civil society as the best — not perfect, but best — conceptual framework for understanding and responding to the most urgent challenge facing our society: the moral renewal of our democratic project.

Seedbeds of Virtue

Are Americans competent to govern themselves? This question has vexed us from the beginning. In 1788, in *Federalist* 55, James Madison wonders whether there is "sufficient virtue among men for self-government." Reflecting upon those "qualities in human nature which justify a certain portion of esteem and respect," Madison reminds us: "Republican government presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form."[9]

An unfree society has much less need of virtuous or civic-minded people. But a democracy, the Founders insisted, depends decisively upon the competence and character of its citizenry. What are those ways of life that self-governance requires? What are those "qualities" that the Constitution "presupposes" in the American people? They are precisely those qualities that are currently disappearing from our society.

Their disappearance is primarily philosophical, hence also institutional. The qualities necessary for self-governance take root in individuals essentially due to the influence of certain moral ideas about the human person and the nature of the good life. The primary exposure to these ideas comes from certain forms of association, beginning with the family. Together, these moral ideas and person-to-person associations have historically constituted our seedbeds of civic virtue — our foundational sources of competence, character, and citizenship. There are at least twelve of them.

The first and most basic is the family.

Why? Because self-governance begins with governing the self. In this sense, the family is the cradle of citizenship, since it is in the family that a child first learns, or fails to learn, the essential qualities necessary for governing the self: honesty, trust, loyalty, cooperation, self-restraint, civility, compassion, personal responsibility, and respect for others. As an institution, the family's distinguishing trait is its powerful combination of love, discipline, and permanence. Accordingly, families can teach standards of personal conduct that cannot be enforced by law, but which are indispensable traits for democratic civil society.

The second is the local community or neighborhood.

All people need safe, stable environments in which they can play in parks, go to the library, walk out the front door to be with other people, help each other,

offer guidance to each other's children, and participate in the various other community activities and relationships that help to make life meaningful. Historically, the U.S. has always been an amalgam of diverse and vital neighborhoods, in this sense more a community of communities than a unitary national culture.

Democracies require communities of this sort. These local environments in which community members maintain a common life, often rooted in collective memory and shared values, constitute precisely those ecologies in which men, women, and children are most likely to thrive. These are places where parents can confidently tell their children: "Go outside and play."

The third is faith communities and religious institutions.

A great majority of Americans consider religion to be of great importance in their lives. During any given week, U.S. church and synagogue attendance exceeds total attendance at all U.S. sporting events by an estimated factor of 13 to one, while voluntary financial contributions to houses of worship exceed total ticket revenue from professional sports by an estimated factor of 14 to one.[10] U.S. faith communities also form the spiritual and institutional backbone of the nation's sizable philanthropic and charitable sector.

If a central task of every generation is moral transmission, religion is a primary force in American life — historically, it has probably been *the* primary force — that transmits from one generation to another the moral understandings that are essential to liberal democratic institutions. Religion is especially suited to this task because it focuses our minds and hearts on obligations to each other that arise out of our shared createdness. By elevating our sights toward others and toward ultimate concerns, religious institutions help us turn away from self-centeredness, or what Tocqueville terms "egotism," democracy's most dangerous temptation, through which "citizens have no sympathy for any but themselves."[11]

At their best, then, our houses of worship foster values that are essential to human flourishing and to democratic civil society: personal responsibility, respect for moral law, and neighbor-love, or concern for others. These same values also help to drive progressive social change. In this sense, it is no accident that organized religion, animated by personal devotion, has been at the heart of arguably the two most important social movements in American history: the abolition of slavery and the civil rights movement.

Many of the essential rituals of civil society are enacted in our houses of worship. Baptisms, bar and bat mitzvahs, weddings, funerals, and other social expressions of the religious impulse connect us to one another and reflect our moral imagination. By helping us to transcend mere economic and political arrangements, our faith communities can guide us toward a common moral life.

The fourth is voluntary civic organizations.

Here are what Alexis de Tocqueville famously called our "voluntary associations," describing them in the 1830s as a hallmark of American exceptionalism and as a defining trait of American civil society. As he put it in *Democracy in America*: "Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions, constantly form associations. They have not only commercial and manufacturing companies, in which all take part, but associations of a thousand other kinds — religious, moral, serious, futile, extensive or restricted, enormous or diminutive."[12] Consider just a few current examples: book clubs, Little League, the Future Farmers of America, the Kiwanis Club, the Girl Scouts, the Chamber of Commerce, the

Advertising Council, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Our reliance upon voluntary associations to achieve social goals stems from the widespread division and dispersal of authority in the United States. A prime example of this phenomenon is our dependence upon private religious associations to guide our public moral philosophy. Another example is philanthropy. In most modern societies, when the issue is distributing money to projects aimed at social betterment, government is usually in the lead. The U.S., with its thick diversity of private philanthropies, is a notable exception. Much of the dynamism and variety of American society stems from this unique structure of dispersed philanthropic authority. In this sense, voluntary associations are custodians of pluralism, undergirding the democratic idea by limiting the homogenization of culture and the centralization of authority.

The fifth is the arts and art institutions.

Music, poetry, literature, dance, theater, painting, sculpture, architecture, and the other arts are crucial legends and components of civil society. Fundamentally, they are statements of meaning and aspiration. They also inevitably ask and answer moral questions: what is good or bad, what is true or false. Toward these purposes, the arts provide us with cognitive and sensual experiences that are otherwise unavailable to us. Much of what we know by way of art is only knowable through art.

At their best, the arts and art institutions affirm core values of civil society: good craftsmanship, sensitivity, creativity, and integrity of materials and expression. In a pluralistic society, the arts can serve as universal languages, permitting authentic cultural exchanges that penetrate to the core

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of human feeling. The arts can elevate public discourse by providing models of beauty and standards of clarity. They can activate the imagination. Education in the arts can root children in their cultural traditions; such education is essential to the task of cultural transmission. In these ways, contemplation of the arts permits us to transcend the utilitarian preoccupations of everyday life.

The sixth is local government.

Closely related to voluntary civic organizations, and a partial exception to the thesis that our basic challenge is not governmental, the structures of participatory local government — school boards, recreation boards, town meetings, and other forms of face-to-face civic engagement — are primary incubators of civic competence. Structures of local government activate the potential for civic engagement. They model and transmit not only a general sense of civic responsibility, but also the particular skills of citizenship: deliberation, compromise, consensus building, and reason giving.

The seventh is our system of primary and secondary education.

Especially in democracies, which must continually nourish their comparatively few founts of common culture, a basic responsibility of schools is cultural transmission: passing on to students a civilizational story in which they all can share, in part by teaching them the skills to participate in and help shape that story.

In addition to teaching basic intellectual skills, schools in self-governing societies are called upon to embody and require basic standards of good conduct: personal responsibility, respect for teachers' authority, and respect for other students. Also, educational institutions sustain democratic culture by helping students attain civic literacy, including knowledge of their country's constitutional heritage, respect for the lives of national heroes, including great dissidents, a comprehension of what good citizenship is, and an appreciation of their society's civic and moral ideals.

The eighth is higher education.

If you could look only in one place to take the deepest measure of our civilization, where would you look? Some members of this council would choose to look at our religious ideas and institutions. Others would choose our system of higher education. Especially in our era, when the social authority of religious belief has weakened, and when more young people than ever go on to some form of higher education, the modern university may be our truest cultural barometer, our most accurate indicator of who we are becoming.

The rise of the modern university, originating in part from the intellectual demands of theological inquiry, roughly accompanies the rise of modern democracy. Both have roots in a common set of civilizational values, including intellectual freedom, a reliance upon reason and the scientific method, a belief in the objectivity of truth and knowledge, and confidence that the diffusion of knowledge contributes to civic virtue.

The ninth is business, labor, and economic institutions.

Business and economic institutions play an increasingly prominent role in civil society. For millions of Americans today, the workplace is a primary source of personal identity and a central venue for social relationships. Indeed, for many people, the workplace may be more

influential than neighborhood, house of worship, or even family. Americans have also long believed that the experience of work itself — of giving honest value in return for fair reward — can build good character.

Similarly, while private firms in free market economies operate in part according to a calculus of rational self-interest, they are also pervaded by dense webs of moral ties and associations. Consequently, private firms in free societies are major custodians — and can themselves become major creators or destroyers — of social competence, ethical concern, and social trust.

Why? Because work is intrinsically social. Work is bound up with self-interest, but it also typically points past itself, toward service, cooperation with others, and the common good. Employment is thus partly a private relationship, but also one with intrinsic dignity and a substantial public dimension. For this reason, business, labor, and economic institutions do not exist apart from the rest of civil society. That the economy is part of civil society also demonstrates that it is part of our moral order as well — not some extrinsic force, and certainly not an end in itself, but rather a major reflection of our judgements about the conditions for human flourishing and the larger meanings of our common life.

The tenth is media institutions.

Here is the seedbed that is most rapidly expanding in size and influence. It is also the business institution that Americans most universally criticize as undermining civic life. From a parent's perspective, one of the most important changes in family life in the second half of this century has been the growing influence of the media in the socialization of children.

Great majorities of parents now believe that the cultural values promulgated by broadcast, cinematic, and other electronic media are overtly and increasingly hostile to the values that parents want their children to acquire.[13] Despite (and perhaps partly because of) the new television ratings system, so recently announced and applauded by politicians and industry executives, the rapid vulgarization of this season's television programming, much of it aimed at children, has been sad and even sickening to behold.[14] From a democrat's perspective, the growing dominance of the entertainment media in our national life, including the collapse of any boundary between entertainment and journalism, is now on almost everyone's short list of what to blame for many of the ills of our democracy, including the rise of cynicism, the decline of face-to-face civic engagement, and the spread of incivility.[15]

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The eleventh is a shared civic faith and a common civic purpose.

What is our nation's purpose? What brings us together and defines us as a people? Unlike most countries, our answers to these questions are primarily philosophical. We are a nation dedicated to certain propositions. As the Founders put it: "We hold these truths."

The civic truths that we hold — and that hold us together — are those of Western constitutionalism, rooted in both classical understandings of natural law and natural right and in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. Our founding idea is liberty, guided by the proposition that all people are created equal. Our shared civic faith is one of republican self-governance. The juridical principles that define us as a people are those of the American Constitution. Our common civic purpose is a government that secures the blessings of liberty, including the freedom to search together for a workable understanding of equality. The briefest expressions of this civic creed are inscribed on our coins: "Liberty" and "E Pluribus Unum" ("From many, one").

America was born, and from time to time is reborn, largely around these basic civic truths. At their best, they guide us toward a story of robust citizenship and cooperative civic endeavor, embodied in the notion of the commonwealth, in which citizens combine the private pursuit of happiness with devotion to the public good.

The twelfth is a public moral philosophy.

Because our civic truths are largely constitutional and procedural, they do not tell us how to pursue happiness or how to live a good life. Instead, they establish principles of justice for a society in which pluralism is a fact and freedom is a birthright. In addition to civic truths, then, our democracy depends upon moral truths.

The moral truths that make possible our experiment in self-governance are in large part biblical and religious. They are also strongly informed by the classical natural law tradition and the ideas of the Enlightenment. They are what the Founders called "laws of nature and of nature's God" and what Martin Luther King, Jr. called "higher law." The most eloquent expressions of our reliance upon these truths are found in the *Declaration of Independence*, Washington's *Farewell Address*, Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* and *Second Inaugural Address*, and King's *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*. The briefest expression of this reliance is inscribed on our coins: "In God We Trust."

These truths authorize the possibility of our democracy. Without them, all of our democracy's seedbeds, including our civic truths, atrophy. First, our moral truths underwrite our *social* well being, primarily because they teach us to govern our appetites and to transcend selfishness. Only our moral truths insist that we Americans understand freedom, our primary civic end, as an ethical condition — not simply as immunity from restraint, but instead as the morally defined mean between license and slavery.

Second, our moral truths underwrite our *political* freedom. In some societies, there is only one master organizing device for society: the state. In this sense, all of life's questions, including what is virtue and what is a good life, are political questions, answered ultimately by government. Our tradition resists this unitary model of society, insisting in particular upon the disestablishment of religion and the right of religious freedom. This change serves to relativize the political domain, in part by limiting the power and reach of the state, and in part by causing government itself to draw legitimacy from, and operate under, a larger moral canopy that is not of its own making. This relativization of politics also places a special responsibility on the morality-shaping institutions of civil society.

Finally, our moral truths underwrite the very rationale for democratic civic engagement. In this sense, they are guarantors of our *civic* well being. For here is the first philosophical prerequisite for robust civic engagement: the belief that your opponent is not your enemy, and that you and your opponent are more alike than different. And why is that? For many of us, the answer is that all people, as persons created in the image of God, possess transcendent human dignity, and that consequently each person must always be treated as an end, never as a means. The Founders affirmed as "self-evident" this moral idea that all persons possess equal dignity.

And here is the second and most fundamental prerequisite: the belief that moral truth exists and that it is accessible to people of reason and good will. Otherwise, why have any faith at all in democratic civic engagement? For these reasons, reverent regard for a public moral philosophy — an ensemble of knowable, objective moral truths — is our democracy's most indispensable foundation.

The Moral Crisis

NO NATION on earth has so thoroughly staked its success on the functioning of free and voluntary civic associations. Yet during the past three decades in the United States, at least some of these primary institutions of civic engagement have significantly eroded. For this reason, a number of leading analysts have recently suggested that our fundamental challenge today is re-empowering local civic organizations and renewing face-to-face civic interaction throughout our society.

In this view, if we would spend less time as workers and consumers, and more time as citizens and neighbors; if we would vote and volunteer and participate more, and watch TV less; if we would recognize those among us who suffer not primarily as clients of the state, but as neighbors in need — if we would do these things more often and energeti-

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cally, we would finally be engaging our deepest problems. In brief, our core imperative is democratic renewal through civic engagement.

There is much to commend in this vision. Our local associations help us to attain a sense of purpose and belonging by anchoring us in particular loyalties and specific relationships. They nourish the habits and skills of citizenship. Through their diversity and through their independence from the state, they also embody cultural pluralism and help to safeguard political freedom.

Yet this conception of the solution — democratic renewal via civic engagement — ultimately ignores as much as it illuminates. This idea tends to ignore the family, almost certainly civil society's most important institution. It also tends to ignore the role of business, labor, and economic institutions in creating or depleting social capital.

More fundamentally, it ignores a key question: What would make anyone want to participate in civic life in the first place? And what would enable anyone to distinguish between "good" civil society, such as efforts to start a hospital or help the homeless, and "bad" civil society, such as private militias or efforts to exclude racial minorities?

Civic participation, as an independent imperative, is more about process than substance. It is ultimately a means, not an end in itself. Put differently, effective civic engagement in a democracy presupposes, and depends on, a larger set of shared ideas about human virtue and the common good. In short, effective civic engagement requires a public moral philosophy. Absent a guiding set of shared moral truths, voluntary civic associations can be just as harmful to human flourishing as any big government bureaucracy or big business bureaucracy.

Moreover, while our civic truths depend upon moral truths, the latter cannot be derived from the former. Our public morality (essentially religious, philosophical, and extra-legal) constitutes something over and above our civic norms (essentially constitutional, juridical, and procedural). To imagine otherwise — to suppose that a free society can derive its public morality from a strictly civic realm — is to fall precisely into that unitary view of society in which everything is ultimately political, decided by the state. If independent moral truth does not exist, all that is left is power. Such a view of reality is, among other things, antithetical to the western ideal of human freedom. In the long run, it is likely to prove fatal to the project of republican self-governance.

What ails our democracy is not simply the loss of certain organizational forms, but also the loss of certain organizing ideals — moral ideals that authorize our civic creed, but do not derive from it. At the end of this century, our most important challenge is to strengthen the moral habits and ways of living that make democracy possible.

The Moral Economy

THE ECONOMY exists to support human flourishing. It is not an end in itself. For this reason, our political economy is inextricably linked to our moral economy, and it is therefore impossible to speak responsibly of moral renewal without addressing its economic dimensions.

For example, the weakening of civil society, including its moral foundations, is closely connected to the persistence and spread of economic inequality. The connection flows both ways. Urban joblessness, diminished economic prospects for poorly educated, low-income minority youth, parents who have less time for their children because they are spending so much time at work in order to keep ahead of the bill collectors — these are clearly examples in which material conditions can worsen civil society and deplete moral and social capital.

Conversely, a fragile civil society worsens material conditions. The depletion of civic faith, especially our belief that we are one people, with obligations to one another, surely helps to cause (and also excuse) the spread of inequality. The erosion of our seedbed institutions — such as nuclear families and kin networks whose members can support each other economically and help their young people to find jobs — clearly contributes to the deteriorating economic prospects facing many of our citizens.

More broadly, our economic and family values are not so easy to disentangle. When, for example, we come to believe as employers and employees that relationships are typically short-term, that loyalty is outdated, and that "me first" is the final rule, should it surprise or even concern us when these same principles come to dominate our understandings of marriage, parenthood, and civic life?

Is it merely a coincidence that, for most Americans in recent decades, our roles as workers and consumers have gotten thicker and more dominant, while our roles as family members and neighbors have grown thinner and weaker? No. These various dimensions of our lives are not separate spheres, divergent questions; they are different ways in which we confront the same basic questions.

Part of the challenge of renewing civil society, then, is to relativize economics, recognizing that free markets and cost-benefit analyses are primarily means, not ends. They can

tell us how, but not what or why. Economic activity within democratic civil society is not a definition of, but an opportunity for, moral responsibility and authentic self-determination.

For precisely the same reason, however, another aspect of renewing civil society is recognizing the moral bases of economic activity. Consider just a few obvious examples. The increasingly crude use of sex by corporate advertisers to sell products. Our seeming complacency in the face of jolting new disparities between the most successful and the most shattered among us. Our frequent desire to believe that whatever the free market produces must be valid. Our tendency to treat other people, and at times even view ourselves, primarily as consuming objects who purchase an identity in the market place. In each case, it is clear that our economic activities and institutions are not exempt from the need for moral renewal.

The Human Person

In large measure, to affirm the existence and importance of moral truth is to confirm a particular understanding of the human person. Indeed, regarding many cultural issues today, from doctor-assisted suicide to cloning to divorce, it may increasingly be our answer to this upstream question — what is a person? — that ultimately guides our downstream conclusions. For this reason, defining the human person may be where America's civil society debate is ultimately headed.

According to many people — perhaps in some respects according to most Americans today — we humans, at least in the U.S., are autonomous units of desires, rights, and legitimate values of our own choosing. We are self-originating sources of valid claims,[16] essentially unencumbered, self-owning, and auto-teleological. For short, call it a philosophy of expressive individualism, or a belief in the sovereignty of the self — a kind of modern democratic equivalent of the old idea of the divine right of kings.

We view this understanding of the human person as fundamentally flawed. We understand human beings as free, reasonable, and therefore responsible beings with a basic drive to question in order to know. Deliberating, judging, and choosing — having reasons for what we value and love — are characteristic human activities. For this reason, what we value and love is intelligible and therefore public. What is reasonable transcends our purely private imaginings; it is something in which all persons have the potential to share. Our capacity for reasonable choosing and loving is what allows us to participate in a shared moral life, an order common to us all.

For these reasons, we understand humans as intrinsically social beings, not autonomous creatures who are the source of their own meaning and perfection. We humans only live in communities, through which we are talked into talking and loved into loving. Only through such connectedness can we approach authentic self-realization.

From this perspective, the basic subject of society is the human person, and the basic purpose of government — and all other institutions — is to help foster the conditions for human flourishing. In turn, the essential conditions for human flourishing are the elements of what we are calling democratic civil society, anchored in moral truth.

A Strategy for Renewal

At the end of this century, America's primary challenge is the moral renewal of our democracy. Toward this end, we propose three major goals:

First, to increase the likelihood that more children will grow up with their two married parents.

This goal recognizes the steady break-up of the married couple child-raising unit as the leading propeller of our overall social deterioration and the necessary starting point for any strategy aimed at recovery. Reversing the trend of family fragmentation is a necessary (though not sufficient) step toward the larger goal of strengthening the ability of parents to raise healthy, caring, productive, and morally grounded children.

Second, to adopt a new "civil society model" for evaluating public policies and solving social problems.

Regarding any public policy proposal, the first question should be: Will this policy strengthen or weaken the institutions of civil society? Regarding any major societal goal, the first question should be: Can this goal be achieved by utilizing and empowering the institutions of civil society?

The old model is essentially mechanistic, relying on government regulation or economic incentives. As public policy, the old model tends toward centralized authority and direct intervention. It is largely problem-oriented. By contrast, the new model is essentially ecological. It strives to view social environments the way ecologists view natural environments. Accordingly, it tends toward decentralized structures of authority and a rich diversity of approaches. It is largely prevention-oriented, seeking not so much to specify outcomes as to shift probabilities, primarily by protecting and, when possible, enhancing the overall "climate" of institutions and ideals that constitute civil society.

The old model is a stool with two legs: government and economics. The new model adds the missing third leg: social institutions and values. The old model both presupposes and (often unintentionally) depletes social capital. The new model seeks directly to protect and nourish social capital. In the old model, society consists of its individual members. In the new model, society consists of individual members who are encultured by institutions and obligated to the common good. The old model is aggressively secular, often influenced by a professional social work or "client" approach, and is typically reluctant to employ moral reasoning or offer moral judgements. The new model, while strictly protecting religious freedom, is more accommodating to faith-based activism and public service, favors community-based mentors and citizen leaders over outside professionals and experts, and, as a result, is more able to rely upon moral reasoning and to exercise moral judgement.

Third, to revitalize a shared civic story informed by moral truth.

This final goal is the most important. Regarding our civic faith, our main challenge is to rediscover the democratic bonds that, amidst and because of our differences, unite us as one people. Regarding our public moral philosophy, our main challenge is to rediscover the existence of transmittable moral truth.

Recommendations

The family:

1. We call upon all of us who are parents to rededicate ourselves to spending more time with our children and providing them with greater moral guidance.

2. We hope that we as parents will strive to strengthen the bonds of community and mutual support with our neighbors and with other parents, and nurture the marriage bond as the first and most important gift we give to our children.

3. We hope that parents will more strongly resist the pressure to acquire more and more material things, and will increasingly join with other parents to stand against the forces of materialism that can pollute our children's moral environment.

4. We recommend that public policy at all levels seek explicitly to recognize and protect marriage as a social institution.

5. We recommend that the federal tax code recognize the family, not just the individual, as a basic unit of taxation. Specifically, we recommend that the tax code treat the married-couple family household as a single unit of taxation; end the "marriage penalty" in the tax code by permitting married couples to split (share equally) their income for purposes of taxation; avoid creating tax incentives for unwed childbearing or divorce; avoid creating tax disincentives for within-wedlock childbearing or for parental care of children and other unpaid labor in the home or community; and support the rearing of children through generous and universal per capita deductions, exemptions, and credits.

6. Through the federal tax code, we recommend the creation of new educational credits or vouchers for parents who leave the paid labor force for a period of time to care for young children. These credits could be used for high school, vocational, college, graduate, or post-graduate education. This reform would improve child well-being and strengthen family life by encouraging more parental care of young children. It would also enhance human and social capital through continuing education. Finally, this reform would honor the parental vocation, in part by reducing the long-term educational, training, and labor force disadvantages of at-home parental care of children.

7. We urge clergy and communities of faith to devote prayerful attention and greater resources to programs of pre-marriage counseling and education, marital enrichment, marriage mentoring, and help for marriages in crisis, as well as to the development of community marriage policies in which a diversity of clergy and congregations in a community commit to lowering the divorce rate and creating a culture of marriage within congregations and in the larger community.

8. We hope that state legislatures will consider reforming no-fault divorce laws. The twin purposes of reform are lowering the divorce rate and improving the quality of marriage.

Ideas for reform include: extending the waiting period for divorce; establishing incentives or requirements for pre-marital education and for marital counseling in cases of at-risk marriages; and, in cases in which only one spouse wants the divorce, requiring the establishment of fault. Another potentially promising reform is "covenant marriage" legislation, recently adopted in Louisiana and now being considered in other states, which permits individual couples to opt out of the no-fault system and enter into a legally more binding marriage.

9. We recommend that the U.S. Congress repeal federal regulations that currently prevent local school districts from taking actions to discourage unwed teen childbearing. Some schools may wish to adopt new policies stating that students who become pregnant, or who impregnate someone, are thereafter ineligible for extra-curricular school activities, such as sports, glee clubs, or homecoming awards. Other schools may wish to use incentives rather than disincentives. Consistent with the mandate to educate all young people, federal regulation should encourage local experimentation in this area rather than prevent it.

10. As part of their newly reformed welfare programs, we urge governors and state legislatures to remember the fathers and to promote marriage. Too often in welfare reform, the priority of economic self-sufficiency for single mothers has overshadowed the priority of strengthening fragile families. Specifically, we recommend that states establish preferences for low-income married couples in the distribution of limited, discretionary benefits such as public housing units and Head Start slots. We also recommend that, whenever possible, states expand their welfare-to-work programs to include low-income males, especially those who are married fathers.

The local community or neighborhood:

11. We hope that neighborhood and civic leaders, philanthropies, communities of faith, and others will support and participate in efforts aimed at community empowerment and community organizing — efforts that, in some of our nation's poorer and more marginalized communities, are developing new local leaders and rebuilding society.

12. One promising new civil society entity for saving and building affordable housing is the non-profit community development corporation, or CDC. There are about 2,000 CDC's in the U.S. today, building and rehabilitating housing for poorer families who are under-served by current landlords and private, for-profit developers. CDC's are rooted in communities and typically sponsored by neighborhood associations, churches, social agencies, tenant groups, and unions. They focus not only on physical issues such as open space and density, but on other factors that influence housing choices, such as drugs, crime, transportation, retail development, and city services. In these ways, CDC's not only build and fix up houses; they also build the social trust and fix up the community networks which are essential for turning houses into stable homes in good communities. We recommend that new U.S. federal housing policies recognize and support the work of effective CDC's in rebuilding battered communities.

Faith communities and religious institutions:

13. The *sina qua non* for American renewal is the renewal of a common moral life. Such a renewal will not take place unless faith communities and religious institutions play a leading role, since vigorous communities of faith are vital to the discernment and transmission of moral truth. For this reason, we urge religious institutions to recognize their crucial role and oppose the trends that would push religion to the fringes of American public life.

14. We call upon religious institutions to take more seriously the work of helping to strengthen families, including supporting parents in the day-to-day work of raising their children and helping families to recover and live out a sense of the sacred in everyday life.

15. We urge faith communities to step up their efforts to help families resist the growing pressures of materialism and the growing penetration of commercial values into family life. As one step, we urge faith-based organizations to follow the lead of the Roman Catholic Church, which recently called upon business advertisers to "respect the dignity of the human person" and accept moral responsibility for "what they seek to move people to do."[17]

16. We hope that more religious organizations across the country will begin working actively with state welfare agencies and juvenile justice officials, providing mentoring and other services, all aimed at reducing poverty and helping fellow citizens in need. Examples of this type of church-based witness and community service include a mentoring program for juvenile offenders in Richmond County, South Carolina, and a mentoring program for families on public assistance in Ottawa County, Michigan.

17. We recommend that the President and the Congress strengthen and expand the 1996 "charitable choice" legislation which permits faith-based organizations, without denying or relinquishing their religious charter, to compete on equal terms with other private groups for government contracts to deliver welfare services to the poor. We hope that an expanded charitable choice provision will apply to all federal laws which currently authorize government at any level to contract with non-governmental organizations to provide services.

Voluntary civic organizations:

18. We recommend that the U.S. Congress create a new federal tax credit for individual contributions of up to $500 ($1,000 for married couples) to charitable organizations whose primary purpose is the prevention or alleviation of poverty. The goals of this reform are to stimulate individual giving to a wide diversity of anti-poverty initiatives, and to shift a modest but measurable proportion of overall authority for anti-poverty resource allocation and service provision from the federal government to the institutions of civil society. We recommend that state governments consider adopting a similar policy.

19. We hope that sports and youth organizations will re-examine their attitudes and policies, deepening their commitment to the ideals of sportsmanship, fair play, and respect for others. We hope that these associations will reaffirm the proper place of all sports within the larger civic realm — a realm that ought, in a civil society, to transcend and relativize the realms of entertainment and revenue generation. Such a rediscovery would surely foster much greater discipline regarding the reality of athletes as personal heroes and civic role models. This work has already begun through organizations such as the Citizenship Through Sports Alliance, convened by the United States Olympic Committee.

The arts and art institutions:

20. We recommend that parents, public officials, artists, and educators take concerted action to restore arts to the schools and high standards to arts education. In recent decades, despite the proliferation of local arts institutions, the growth of public and private funding for the arts, and greater public access to diverse artistic traditions, audiences for serious music, theater, poetry, literature, and visual arts remain small. In cases such as music and literature, audiences are actually graying and dwindling. Moreover, with each passing year, popular entertainment in almost all its manifestations grows coarser and more harmful to society. These failures are partly rooted in the failure of arts education. In many public school districts, arts programs have been eliminated entirely. Even in school districts that still devote resources to these programs, arts educators today increasingly strive for "relevance" (i.e., connection to contemporary youth culture), typically act as if spontaneity of student expression is the highest value, and focus largely on the therapeutic value of arts activities. What gets lost are the lodestars of genuine arts education: training children in technical sophistication, exposing them to historical masterworks, and aesthetic cultivation. This is a shame. Especially for growing numbers of secularized young people, the arts may represent the last real avenue to moral and spiritual elevation.

Local government:

21. We recommend that the Congress and state legislatures consider litigation reform that would reimpose limits on the duration and content of federal court decrees in areas of local government such as housing, special education, and crime control. The civil society purposes of this reform are to help reverse the current trend of judicial displacement of local government, and to help protect the separation of powers. In our democracy, we rely on courts to protect constitutional rights, not engage in comprehensive, long-term oversight of the structures of local government.

Primary and secondary education:

22. Too many of America's schools are currently unsuccessful in teaching the basic skills of literacy. We recommend that parents, educators, and public officials join together to create a stronger emphasis upon literacy as a primary educational goal.

23. We hope that educators and parents will implement character education programs in schools. These programs have been developed by non-profit organizations such as the Character Education Partnership, Character Counts, the Jefferson Center for Character Education, the Josephson Institute of Ethics, and others.

24. We hope that innovative parents and educators, empowered when necessary by state regulatory reform, will create special charter schools devoted to the ideals of civil society and liberal education. An example of such an experiment is the City on a Hill School in Boston, Massachusetts.

25. To enhance parental authority in the upbringing of their children, and to improve education by enhancing accountability, we urge government at all levels to expand the ability of parents to choose the schools their children attend.

Higher education:

26. Liberal democracies require colleges and universities that provide a liberal education. Yet on too many campuses, both the ideals and realities of a general or liberal education are getting weaker. Too often, higher education may actually erode our sense of common humanity, neglect or disdain the intellectual inheritance of our civilization, narrowly politicize intellectual discourse, and assault even the possibility of discerning truth. In such

cases, higher education undermines the bases of liberal education and liberal democracy. We hope that colleges and universities will act with urgency to renew their commitment to liberal education, inquiring into the ways in which they can strengthen the structure, improve the content, and increase the rigor of that general education which is a paladin of our civil society.

Business, labor, and economic institutions:

27. Free markets, like the free societies they are intended to support, depend for their existence on the overall health of civil society. As they make future decisions, we hope that business and labor leaders will remember this truth. Economic activities that weaken communities or assault the integrity of childhood might not always reveal their ill effects in the short run, but the task of sustaining civil society requires a disciplined commitment to the long run. We especially urge leaders in business to recognize the moral dimensions of the decisions they make. We hope that they might act as if their own children were the ones most directly affected by these decisions.

28. Wherever possible, we urge employers to expand opportunities available to employees for flexible workplace arrangements, including tele-working, job sharing, compressed work weeks, career breaks, job protection and other benefits for short term (up to six months) parental leave, and job preferences and other benefits, such as graduated re-entry, for long term (up to five years) parental leave. The main civil society goal of these new opportunities is to permit parents to spend more time with their children.

29. While some members of this council would not wish to trade the flexibility of U.S. labor markets for those of Japan or Europe, U.S. employers often have more leeway than they might suppose in their treatment of workers. Even in strict economic terms, the companies that do best are often those that do *not* treat their workers like replaceable commodities. Regarding downsizing or replacing permanent employees with independent contractors, temporary workers, or so-called perma-temps, "tough-minded" often turns out to be weak-minded — an example of bad civil society generating bad economics. Wherever possible, we recommend significantly expanded opportunities for employee ownership, employee participation, employee training, workplace organizing and associations, and other policies aimed at enhancing employee loyalty and building human and social capital.

30. While some members of this council are critical of some current trade union practices, we understand the essence of collective bargaining as a system of private ordering which gives the parties directly involved both the opportunity and responsibility to decide the rules that most directly touch the day-to-day conditions of employees. In this sense, trade unions are classic institutions of civil society. We also note that, as workplace organizing and the practice of collective bargaining have receded in recent decades, government intervention in the employment relationship has increased. Unions and collective bargaining can also serve as a non-governmental means of reducing inequality, especially for minorities, while offering individuals an important means to engage in grass-roots self-determination. We believe that trade unions could, and hope that they will, play an important role in renewing civil society.

31. We regret what appears to be a widespread refusal of corporate philanthropies even to consider financial support for faith-based organizations whose mission is to serve the poor and renew civil society. The topic is complicated, but this policy, or at least this attitude, should be reconsidered. There is nothing inherently illegitimate about religiously informed work for social betterment. The proof should be in the pudding. The *a priori* denial of corporate support to faith-based organizations is largely arbitrary and almost certainly counterproductive.

Media institutions:

32. We recommend that the broadcast industry voluntarily re-adopt "Family Hour" policies through which networks agree to exclude inappropriate violence and sexual content from programming at least during the first hour of prime time, usually 8:00 to 9:00 p.m., the hour with the highest concentration of child and teenage viewers. We view the recovery of the "Family Hour" policy as a small but valuable first step toward greater civic responsibility within the broadcast industry.

33. We urge the National Association of Broadcasters, the trade association of television networks and local television stations, to refurbish and re-adopt a voluntary "Television Code" that establishes minimum industry standards regarding the content and frequency of television advertising and the content of television programming. The NAB voluntarily adopted a Television Code in 1952, but abandoned it in 1983, partly due to an antitrust challenge from the U.S. Justice Department regarding the industry's collective oversight of advertising. Abandoning this code was a serious, far-reaching mistake. It ought to be reversed.[18] To alleviate fears of antitrust litigation, we recommend that the Congress pass special legislation to permit this industry to re-adopt a voluntary code of conduct without fearing that such a code might be judged as anti-competitive by the U.S. Government.

34. If the National Association of Broadcasters declines voluntarily to adopt and enforce an ethically serious code of conduct, we urge parents and other consumers collectively to exercise the power of boycotts to make their views known to industry executives and public officials.

35. We hope that our fellow citizens will consider supporting National TV-Turnoff Week, sponsored by TV-Free America.

A shared civic faith and a common civic purpose:

36. We recommend that educators and parents re-examine current practices and pedagogies in an effort to attain higher standards of civic literacy in education. These changes would focus on transmitting to students a knowledge of their country's constitutional heritage, an understanding of what constitutes good citizenship, and an appreciation of their society's common civic faith and shared moral philosophy.

37. We urge governments, educators, and private employers to reform, but not abolish, special efforts to reach out to lower-income African-Americans and other low-income citizens. One hopeful approach, termed "developmental" (as opposed to "preferential") outreach, focuses on special opportunities for performance enhancement among minority and lower-income students and employees without either lowering standards or creating racially based differential standards. The civil society purpose of this form of affirmative action is simple and urgent: racial reconciliation and reaching out with generosity toward what is often called the "underclass," or those of our fellow citizens who are most in need of justice and civic friendship.

38. We hope that local governments, social work and human service professionals, communities of faith and others will seek to strengthen and expand the institution of adoption, including trans-racial adoption. Adoption is an important institution of civil society, yet significantly weakened in recent years. The reasons for strengthening it today are to insure that more children will grow up with two married parents, and to challenge ourselves and one another to reach out to children in need and to overcome parochialism, including racial parochialism.

A public moral philosophy:

39. The insensitivity in the recent past of the U.S. Supreme Court toward the influence of religion in public life has weakened our civil society. Some Supreme Court decisions seem to have been based on the idea that a modern state implies or requires a society sanitized of public religious influence, a society in which religion is forcibly reduced by law to a purely private role. We reject this idea. As one example for the future, we hope that the Court will no longer stifle creative local experiments with church-provided services in poor communities, and more generally, will recognize anew the vital role that religion plays in helping people to help themselves.

40. In addition to its increasingly evident economic and social disadvantages, the civic values that are reflected in state sponsorship of lotteries are inimical to the values necessary for self-government. Democracy requires an ethic of sacrifice and responsibility. State lotteries, backed by massive public advertising campaigns, purvey a counter-civics ethic of escapism and false hope, in which our fortunes in life depend on luck. (The motto of New York's lottery is "You never know!") Government at all levels should cease this harmful practice. Despite the tax revenue involved, we also urge states to discontinue the growing practice of licensing — and therefore indirectly collaborating with — casino gambling and video poker.

41. We hope that all of us, including our society's leaders, might strive to understand morality less as a question of individual taste and more as a question of what is true. Transmittable moral truth is the essential product and foundation of democratic civil society.

Conclusion: Summary Propositions

Democracy depends upon moral truths.

Because our access to truth is imperfect, most moral disagreement calls for civility, openness to other views, and reasonable argument in the service of truth.

Democracy embodies the truth that all persons possess equal dignity.

Civil society embodies the truth that we are intrinsically social beings, cooperating with one another in order to know who we are and how to live.

Democratic civil society is a way of living that calls us fully to pursue, live out, and transmit moral truth.

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Endnotes

[1] See Daniel Yankelovich, "Three Destructive Trends," *Kettering Review* (Fall 1995), 6-15.

[2] Daniel Yankelovich, "Trends in American Cultural Values," *Criterion* 35, no. 3 (Autumn 1996), 2-9.

[3] CNN/*USA Today*/Gallup poll, May 9-12, 1996. By margin of 53 to 42 percent, Americans believe that our moral problems today are more serious than our economic problems. About 60 percent believe that solving our economic problems would solve none or only a few of our moral problems.

[4] *Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think About The Next Generation* (New York: Public Agenda, 1997), 8.

[5] Daniel Yankelovich, "Trends in American Cultural Values," 6.

[6] Peter D. Hart and Robert Teeter, *Wall Street Journal/NBC News* poll, December 5-8, 1996.

[7] "On Civility in America," *The Public Perspective* (December/January 1997), 62-65.

[8] "Real National Unease — Especially on 'the Moral Dimension'", *The Public Perspective* (October/November 1996), 24.

[9] *The Federalist* (New York: The Heritage Press, 1945), 376.

[10] *National and International Religion Report*, May 2, 1994.

[11] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. II (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 123. Tocqueville also writes (Vol. I, 362): "Religion in America takes no direct part in the government of society, but it must nevertheless be regarded as the foremost of the political institutions of that country; for if it does not impart a taste for freedom, it facilitates the use of free institutions."

[12] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, 128-129.

[13] See Dale Kunkel, Kirstie M. Cope, and Carolyn Colvin, *Sexual Messages on Family Hour Television: Content and Context* (Santa Barbara: University of California Department of Communications, December 1996).

[14] According to Nielson ratings, about one million children each week watch "The Jerry Springer Show," arguably the most corrupt and corrupting show now on TV.

[15] See Robert D. Putnam, "The Strange Disappearance of Civic America," *The American Prospect*, no. 24 (Winter 1996), 34-48.

[16] This phrase is from John Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism Moral Theory," *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (September 1980), 543.

[17] Pontifical Council for Social Communication of the Roman Catholic Church, *Ethics in Advertising* (1997), reprinted in *Advertising Age*, March 10, 1997, 26.

[18] In light of current programming, the now discarded Television Code makes for fascinating reading. For example: "Accordingly, in selecting program subjects and themes, great care must be exercised to be sure that treatment and presentation are made in good faith and not for the purpose of sensationalism or to shock or exploit the audience or appeal to prurient interests or morbid curiosity." Indeed, if we simply delete the words "in good faith and not" for the above-quoted sentence, we get an excellent idea of the reigning goals and sensibilities of current TV programming.

The Journey of Life: Youth: From their completion in 1842 through at least the 1870s, Thomas Cole's series of four paintings on *The Voyage of Life — Childhood, Youth, Manhood,* and *Old Age* — were among the most popular works of art in the United States, with printed editions, according to one historian, "almost as often to be found in American homes as had been engravings of George Washington in an earlier generation." *The Voyage of Life: Youth* touches on the themes of *A Call to Civil Society* in several respects. Cole here presents America as a land of Edenic beauty and limitless vitality, often animated by the impetuosity of youth. We also see the tension between the young Voyager's longing for worldly success, as represented by the imaginary palace in the sky, and his ultimate dependence upon transcendent truth, as represented by the guardian Angel of which, as a young man, the Voyager is still unaware. Perhaps most interestingly, the Voyager is on his own, unencumbered by other people, making his pilgrim's progress for himself and by himself — a great American strength, and perhaps also a great American weakness.

Photographs: The photographs seen throughout *A Call to Civil Society* were taken in the Spring of 1998 by Raina Sacks Blankenhorn in an area of Central Park known on the map as Conservatory Water. It is located just inside the park, parallel to Fifth Avenue, going from 73rd to 75th Street. For decades the photographer and her mother have referred to this area as "little Switzerland" for the many small hills surrounding the man-made pond that has given this area its character. Unseen is the work and spirit of many philanthropists, tax dollars, park employees, and citizens who built and maintain this beautiful place in Central Park, itself a great achievement of civil society in New York City.

About the Council on Civil Society

The Council on Civil Society is a group of 24 nationally distinguished scholars and leaders who have come together as unpaid volunteers to examine the sources of competence, character, and citizenship in the United States. Chaired by Jean Bethke Elshtain of the University of Chicago, the council's current goal is to assess the condition of civil society at the close of this century and to make recommendations for the future.

About the University of Chicago Divinity School

The University of Chicago's first president, William Rainey Harper, believed that a great research university ought to have as one central occupation the scholarly study of religion: to prepare ministers for service to the church and scholars for careers in teaching and research. From its inception, the Divinity School has pursued Harper's vision of a nondenominational, non-sectarian institution devoted to systematic research and inquiry into the manifold dimensions of religion, seeking to serve both those preparing for careers in ministry and those preparing for careers in teaching and research.

About the Institute for American Values

The Institute for American Values, founded in 1987, is a private nonpartisan organization devoted to research, publication, and public education on major issues of family well-being and civil society. By providing forums for scholarly inquiry and debate, the Institute seeks to bring fresh knowledge to bear on the challenges facing families and civil society. Through its publications and other educational activities, the Institute seeks to bridge the gap between scholarship and policy making, bringing new information to the attention of policy makers in government, opinion makers in the media, and decision makers in the private sector.

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